

Helen Copley feels Jim Copley's presence

Rules out sale of papers

By Carla Marie Rupp

Helen Copley, blue-eyed, gracious and business-like, wore a light, baby-blue dress, dark-blue glasses, and talked on a navy-blue phone before our interview in her executive office of Copley Press Inc. of La Jolla, California.

Her husband Jim's favorite color was the Copley blue, and it was Helen's favorite before she even came to Southern California from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 23 years ago.

"Dedication and hard work" are Mrs. Copley's words to describe her approach. She succeeded to chairman and chief executive officer of the corporation publishing the Copley Newspapers and publisher of the *San Diego Union* and *Evening Tribune* at the death of her husband James S. Copley October 6, 1973.

"I sometimes feel Jim's presence with me," she said. "And when I'm wondering if I'm doing the right thing, I can feel that he would approve, and that makes me feel good. I have his spirit. He could motivate anyone around him. You instinctively try to keep his philosophy governing the Copley Newspapers in mind," said Mrs. Copley, handing me a Copley blue-covered booklet detailing aims, such as adherence to the Constitution, the republican form of government, free enterprise, a strong defense system and "fairness" in news policy.

Her newspapers—9 dailies, 29 weeklies and a bi-weekly—are having problems, she said, in the economic recession "and we're facing them." First, by trimming, she said, quoting a 5 percent reduction in personnel.

This week, in fact, layoffs of reporters and production employees were continuing at the Union and Tribune as part of what Mrs. Copley has called "general belt-tightening."

"We don't plan any more reductions" she said, than the present ones. She said the corporation had developed "contingency plans—alternatives I won't deal with now" to head off any further problems in the Copley organization.

"But I want to emphasize that we absolutely will not sell any more newspapers," said Mrs. Copley.

Reaching for a cigarette, Mrs. Copley said, "We're facing a large income tax. We don't know quite how much it is yet." How much does she think it is? "Well, that's not for public record," she stated. "That's for us and the government."

Mrs. Copley has taken an active and personal interest in both the editorial quality and technical character of each newspaper. She wants to keep local publishers autonomous so that each newspaper has a distinctive personality to best serve its community. "I consider community involvement and showing the faults in the community."

Mrs. Copley meets with editors on a continuing basis. She likes to see the editors "at least four times a year."

The 1975 Copley Conference was held late February in Borrego Springs, Ca., where Copley's bi-weekly *Borrego Sun* is published.

Mrs. Copley told editors from Copley newspapers of operational changes in the past year, which she said had not been an easy one for the management.

"I am pleased to report that, as a result of these operational improvements, the financial condition of the Copley Newspapers is excellent. Our belts have been tightened, our newspaper plants have been modernized and our operations streamlined," she told them.

Schedule very busy

Mrs. Copley, 55, is the daughter of a prominent family in San Francisco, where this week she will meet with the California Chamber of Commerce, on March 22.



Helen Copley

17-19, Helen Copley will attend the mid-year board of directors meeting of the Inter American Press Association at the Camino Real Hotel, San Salvador, El Salvador. "I love the Latins and South Americans," she says. Her speech on "Freedom of the Press Eroding Throughout the World" summarizes her views that the press is under attack everywhere, giving examples from Latin America.

This speech she presented this fall to the San Francisco Press Club and the night of our interview, to the Sigma Delta Chi chapter in San Diego.

"Speeches," Mrs. Copley confided to *E&P*, "are the biggest trauma of my life. I'm really a very private person." She added that she, a former Copley secretary, doesn't think of her publisher position as "power" or "social status." She's "carrying on" what was installed in her by James about "dedication to newspapering."

Her speeches are packed with interesting information. Does she write them? "No, but I edit the speeches and put them in the words I would use."

Mrs. Copley meets with a 10-man board at the Union-Tribune, spending part of her time there and the rest at her corporate office. She is credited for creating a new Copley senior management board, including four new senior vicepresidents, with which she meets with a least three times a week. With publishers and division heads, that group sometimes comes to about 20, and they meet in a board room next to her office.

Talks about her son David

Mrs. Copley's son, David, 23, is a member of the board of directors of Copley Press Inc. elected David Copley, Mrs. Copley's son, to the board at its annual meeting February 28. David will graduate from Menlo

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